

saga launched fourteen centuries earlier by these pseudo-mythological tannaic giants. RaMaK's fellowship would now take note of ruined synagogues or ancient villages wherein saintly tannaic figures had once studied and lived; maneuver the spirited residues of their hidden caves or engage their grave-markers in erotic ecstasy; study their paths, recite their very teachings and explore the same riverbeds, hills, trees and rocks. In short, the *gerushin* were a potently felt execution of the theurgic drama in all its intricacy, wherein RaMaK's fellowship was the protagonist in a plot of mystical renaissance informed by a mission awaiting closure.

Mission: search and rescue . Target: the Shekhinah

Outside, the storm clouds are gathering / Move silently along the dusty boulevard / Where flowers turn in their fragile necks / So they can in turn greet each other and kiss the sky / The procession moves on / The shouting is over / The fabulous freaks are leaving town / They're driven by a strange desire / Unseen by the human eye / Someone's calling...

Dead Can Dance, *The Carnival is Over*

As R.J.Z Werblowsky has noted, "We can reconstruct the spiritual life of past sages by means of literary documents only. We cannot study it by means of a living encounter with the living representatives of that spirituality. But texts have to be cross-examined for what they say no less for what they leave unsaid".¹³⁶³ It may therefore be apt to start by submitting a fuller narrative that may lend itself once *Sefer Gerushin* has been investigated contextually and elucidated by the knowledge of modern scholarship whose focus has been the phenomenology of mystical experiences. The following few pages disclose an envisioned bystander's view upon following Alkabetz, RaMaK and their intimate fellowship on the excursions which birthed this succinct composition.

(A Bystander's Plausible View)

Safed, 1548 – a procession of mystics led by Solomon Alkabetz and his protégé RaMaK would prepare to leave the city en route to nearby locations in the forested vicinity. Both the *city* [עיר] and its *woody* surroundings [יער] demonstrated through their letter affinity the two aspects of the Sefirah *Malkhut* (*Shekhinah*) – each emitting specific spiritual insights in accordance with its respective higher Sefirot.¹³⁶⁴ The ordeal would thus commence by reciting *The Prayer of Journey* [תפילת הדרכָה] which enlisted the 'city-dwelling *Shekhinah*' for assistance in the forested

vicinities.¹³⁶⁵ The procession would pace watchfully once en route, using the myriad tools at its disposal to take note of the heavenly breath of the *Shekhinah* whose residual echoes [ריישתמה] were still pulsating within the earth's crust. They would perform a meticulous spatiotemporal cartography, for the landscape emitted one tongue by day and another by nightfall,¹³⁶⁶ releasing particular sensations on weekdays and others on the Sabbath and particular festivals. By way of ascetic, inquisitive and ecstatic orientation they would measure distances between various locations and discern hidden trails [שבילים] from more visible paths [נתיבות] and roads [דרכים] – the former symbolizing hidden insights whereas the latter two permitting inquiry which could in turn point to such concealed trails.¹³⁶⁷ In other instances they would distinguish between ravines [ג hollows] and rivers [נהרות] – the former featuring a remitting flow of water and therefore in need of repair whereas the latter would constitute the unremitting flow of water and benevolence, a constant source of spiritual assistance for these warriors of Torah. They would triangulate their own position in relation to sun, moon and earthly portals; search for the middle point between sites of spiritual potency and balance their gravitational pulls by using red, white or green garments to affect judgment, grace or mercy respectively.¹³⁶⁸ They may write amulets with such colors, using the blood of a young goat [גד שער] whose potency in fighting off evil agents they especially appreciated,¹³⁶⁹ or perhaps use four red and white flags, holding them as to precisely discern latitude from longitude on the vertical realm and align those with the horizontal realm in turn – thus stimulating vertical and horizontal flows in the heavenly spheres, discerning benevolence from malevolence or attracting male to female.

Driven by the plea of the *Shekhinah* whose exilic agitation had been intensified through these hills and the ghostly presence of tannaic war veterans, they would attend to the communication reverberating via corporeal and mental gateways - their manifold compass following an ethereal trajectory that seems to have been perpetually orchestrating their quest. In a landscape that had radically transformed to become both map and legend, they would perchance change their trail in

¹³⁶³ See *Tomer Devorah* 9; *Tefilah le-Moshe* 4:12; *Or Yaqr* on *Hakdamat ha-Zohar* 1:19 and on *Bereshit* 6:7.

¹³⁶⁴ See *Sefer Gerushin*, entry 3, p.3 on a nightfall excursion and entry 7, p.9 regarding "Nighttime redemption" as a means to restore the proper theosophical flow and achieve Daytime redemption. Compare with e.g., *Tomer Devorah*, chapter 10; *Pardes Rimonim* chapter 18 entirely, 5:6; 8:19; 23:8; 23:12; *Tefilah le-Moshe* 10:13; *Or Yaqr* on *Zohar*, ba-Midbar 3, on *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* 2:8, 5:3; *Shiur Qomah* 6:6 and his Introduction to *Ra'aya Meheimana*, note 4 – cf: Sack, B. (1995 a), p.129.

¹³⁶⁵ See e.g., *Pardes Rimonim* 12:1 and compare with *Perush Sefer Yetzirah*, chapter 1.

¹³⁶⁶ See e.g., *Pardes Rimonim* 10:1. On the use of white clothes as a means to associate with the Holy priesthood of the Temples era, see Kimelman, R. (2003), pp.142-167.

¹³⁶⁷ *Pardes Rimonim*, ibid.

¹³⁶³ Werblowsky, R.J.Z. in Green, A. (ed., 1987), p.12.

¹³⁶⁴ See *Sefer Gerushin*, entry 63, p.77.

reply to the call of a *Queen* insubstantial yet intimately available - sensing her presence saturating everything around them. They may even halt abruptly midcourse for her immediate relief when such a need was felt – whereupon they may search for the *source* of a nearby spring and drink its flowing water whose clarity aided a precision of mind and spirit;¹³⁷⁰ sprinkle water on the ground as a gesture of rejuvenation and better energetic flow; pour *cold* water on their bodies to shiver into alertness their own corporeal vitality;¹³⁷¹ caress the grass to symbolically motivate growth on high; rub their chests to stimulate the soul within; cast pebbles into a well to prevent evil agents from hindering their quest; knock stones against each other or shake branches in the wind to reawake the earth and motivate its communicational transparency; even permutating letters with great concentration to excite the vertical and horizontal flow amidst the higher heavenly rungs - so they, in turn, may blissfully affect the *Shekhinah* from above. Clapping their hands in songs of encouragement or practicing radical affliction in acts of dramatic empathy - casting away either comfort or complacency, be it day or night - the path of this vanguard was informed by compassion and urgency, their destiny sustained by asceticism and ecstasy.

At a certain juncture they would wrap themselves with prayer shawls and phylacteries in silent murmur. Commencing the *Eighteen Part Benediction* they would raise their hands high in the air, up to three consecutive hours at times. Wishing to rejoin the human foundational condition before the primordial Sin, their phylacteries now stood for the *garments of light* [כְּתֻנוֹת אֱלֹהִים] which were Adam's primal status prior to the sin which rapped around him as "Garments of skin" [כְּתַנּוֹת שָׁר].¹³⁷² With acute attentiveness to keys of wisdom hidden within the Hebrew language, they would chart phonetic or etymological affinities between words and harness them for epistemic clarity and practical manipulation: now attempting to *shake off the skin* [לְנַעַר שָׁר] and *awaken* the soul [לְהַתְעוּרֵר אָרוֹר בְּעָרוֹר],¹³⁷³ their bodies would start trembling, gradually turning into violent shuddering followed by ecstatic fluctuations between weeping and exultation. RaMaK would not endorse a literal understanding of this idea, according to which men would actually stand naked and engage the nearby grounds in search of

¹³⁷⁰ See *Eilima Rabbat*, *Ein Kol* 5:38.

¹³⁷¹ See *Sefer Gerushin*, entry 55, pp.65-66.

¹³⁷² Genesis 3:21.

¹³⁷³ *Sefer Gerushin*, entry 17, pp.18-19 and compare with *Or Yaqr* on *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* 2:12.

further preparatory refinement – a practice he had deemed "Vile and impure"¹³⁷⁴ and might have hinted to certain Sufi rites.

These liturgical ordeals would anxiously await the exclamation 'Amen' wherein a profound unification of the *Shekhinah* (*Malkhut*) with the *Sefirah Tif'eret* became the polishing mechanism toward both theosophical transparency and repair known as 'A speculum that shines' (אָסְפְּקָלִירִיא אֲמַירָה). It was a process whose function had been simultaneously diagnostic and remedial, aiming to lucidly fathom the theosophical traffic and restore the *Shekhinah* back to its primordial state as the 7th *Sefirah*, above *Netzah*, *Hod* and *Yesod*, "Since the *Tikkun* (restoration) is [...] its true place above *Netzah* and *Hod* [...] and she is currently demoted".¹³⁷⁵ These liturgical ordeals would reach a crescendo with the 'Shema' prayer which would in turn end with an earsplitting, stirring and prolonged "אחד" (*Ehad* / One) – a word which both affirmed unequivocally *metaphysical* unity and evoked the theurgic mechanisms needed for its *theosophical* restoration to harmonious unity¹³⁷⁶; "The loyalty which is the secret of *Amen*, that is the unification of all ten sefirot" [גָּמְן בְּסָדוֹ אֶםְן, דְּהִינָּנוּ יְהֹוד וְקַשְׁר כָּל יְ[בָּאָה].¹³⁷⁷

The members would then *kiss* their prayer shawl and either slowly or abruptly fall to the ground [נַפְלִית אֲפִים]¹³⁷⁸ as dead [מִיתָת נְשִׁיקָה]¹³⁷⁹ nurturing from the Talmudic depiction of the tannaitic martyr Rabbi Akiva "Whose soul departed at 'One' (the end of the *Shema*)"¹³⁸⁰ and aspiring to achieve this level of *devekut*, "A great love of God [which] is added to [one's] soul and [his] death in communion [with God]."¹³⁸¹ In such moments of solitude each would perhaps engage in intimate discourse with the *Sefirah* intrinsic to his soul and possibly continue to seclude himself from one and all en route to an optimal quieting of the soul rendered 'A point of equanimity' [נקודות השתוות]. This highly desired condition featured a momentous concurrence of absorption and serenity, close to that achieved by the primordial Adam "Whose quietude was infinite" [שְׁהִתְחַיָּה שְׁלוֹוֹת תְּכִלַּת הַשְׁלֹוֹת]¹³⁸² and wherein corporeal stillness afforded the mental cleansing indispensable to eradicate the clogs disrupting optimal energetic flow within ones

¹³⁷⁴ See *Derishot ve-Hakirot be-Inyanei ha-Mal'akhim* 7:3.
¹³⁷⁵ *Eilima Rabbat*, *Ein Kol* 3:11.

¹³⁷⁶ See its treatment in *Zohar* 2:133b-134a; cf. Tishby, I. (1949), vol.3, pp.1023-1029. See also in RaMaK's *Hanhagot*, No. 26 – cf. Schechter, S. (1908), p.293.

¹³⁷⁷ *Shiur Qomah*, p.61. On this issue see also Green, A. (2003), pp.3-7.

¹³⁷⁸ See his notes in *Sefer Gerushin*, entry 74, pp.96-97 and see Sack, B. (1995 a), pp.234-236 and fins.15,16,17,18.

¹³⁷⁹ See e.g., *Or Ne'erav* 4:1. On this issue see also Fishbane, M. (rpr. ed., 1996), especially chapter 1.

¹³⁸⁰ *Babylonian*, *Berakhot* 61b. See e.g., *Eilima Rabbat*, *Ein Kol* 5:32.

¹³⁸¹ *Or Ne'erav* 2:2.

¹³⁸² *Eilima Rabbat*, *Ein Kol* 5:1.

interrelating attributes, “[...] Since man’s ability to negate the obstructions of the place activates his senses according to their divine nature until they reach true unification.”¹³⁸³ “Should a man be able to purify a limb of his limbs”, RaMaK would now declare, “it shall motivate its superior counterpart, that which is rendered the same name above, be it a hand, a leg, an eye etc”¹³⁸⁴. Having deemed themselves microcosms of the entire sefirotic structure, the mystics held such techniques in high regard – not only for their wholesome theurgic potency but also for them having been conduits leading back to the primordial Edenic state, that “Which may be apprehended by certain righteous men while still in this [lower] world”¹³⁸⁵ “Should one take off and eradicate the vile attire and put on the clothes which correspond with that [higher] realm”.¹³⁸⁶

Reawakening, their lips and limbs would coordinate utterance and movement, their eyes and fingers following letters vigilantly combined and carefully pronounced en route to assume their theurgic roles on high: through a nuanced employment of the Hebrew language whose designation as *God’s Vernacular* rendered it an exclusive path to *Truth* [ת. מ. א.], these words were not only conduits for spiritual ascendance and epistemic progress but also a blueprint for practical use, physical manipulation and theurgic competence. Evidently influenced by the Abulafian approach, the members would arrange letters in five groups according to their hierarchical associations both within divinity and within the human vocal properties: the sefirot *Gedulah*, *Gevurah*, *Tif’eret*, *Netzah* and *Hod* would now correspond with letter combinations whose vocal potency resided respectively “In the throat, in the pallet, on the tongue, on the teeth and on the lips”.¹³⁸⁷ Our perplexed bystander might therefore find the members emitting different letters and nonsensical words¹³⁸⁸ with acute attentiveness to their precise point of vocal origin and practicing further their various combinations thereof: stretching their lips and exercising their throats; knocking their teeth, rolling their tongues or training their pallets. Had RaMaK noticed this bystander, he might have assured him that no sense may be made by such words, pointing him to his 21st chapter in *Pardes Rimonim* (*Sha’ar Pirtei ha-Shemot*) where he had already introduced many of these dumbfounding combinations and explained that “He who

¹³⁸³ *Shiur Qomah*, p.84.

¹³⁸⁴ *Pardes Rimonim* 22:1.

¹³⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 31:4; 31:5.

¹³⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 31:6 and compare with *Zohar* 2:147a, 3:169b; *Zohar Hadash* 90b. See also Cohen-Alro, D. (1987), pp.51 and 62; Kimelman, R. (2003), pp.161-164; Wolfson, E.R. (1990), pp.xxv-xlix.

¹³⁸⁷ *Pardes Rimonim* 27:27 and compare with *Perush le-Sefer Yetzirah* 2:3 and 2:6.

¹³⁸⁸ On this issue see also Tishby, I. (1949), vo.1, pp.66-68.

studies these names shall find nonsensical syllables or words unrestricted by guttural conventions [חיבות בלתי מוגבלות, בלתי מוגבלים בհזאת הפה] and therefore inconceivable.”¹³⁸⁹

These rituals were part of a greater scheme wherein *etymological* affinities of words unlocked a divine key pertaining to their *concrete* manipulation below: investigation (*kushiyah* - קושיה) corresponded with knocking (*hakashah* - הקשה); attribute (*midah* - מידה) with measurement (*medidah* - מדידה) and prostration in supplication (*hitmodedut* - התמודדות); law (*halakhah* - הלכה) with walking (*halikhah* - הליכה); wandering (*na va-nad* - נע ונד) with shaking and trembling (*ni’anu’a / nidud* - נטען / ננדח); revelation (*hitgalut* - הtgtglות) with exile (*galut* - גלות); drawing near [*hitkarut* - הtgtקרות] with sacrifice [*korban* - קרבן]; body [*גוף*] with asceticism [*simcha* - סימחה]; or imagination (*dimui* - דמי) with land (*adamah* - אדמה). Having followed such dialectical principals as “The shell is a [divine] regulation to attain the sacred [core]” [הקליפה צורך הקדשה], “Descent is regulated for ascent” [ירידת לצורך עלייה] or “Concealment is the cause of revelation and revelation is the cause of concealment” [העלם סיבת הtgtגלות והtgtגלות סיבת הגלם], these members seriously attended to tangibles as decoding agents which binded the real and corporeal with the ethereal and the surreal – allowing the immediately accessible its role in deciphering the remotely reachable: “The vessel is a preparatory medium for the soul”.¹³⁹⁰

As they lie, a few would gradually turn over to their right, stretching their left arm upward only to retrieve it in a tender gesture, as if embracing an invisible beloved spouse and effecting grace upon her.¹³⁹¹ Others would assemble twelve stones which symbolized the tribes of Israel, the signs of the Zodiac, the months of the year and the potencies of the soul, placing them under their heads as “Jacob who gathered twelve stones under his head and unified them”. Thereafter they may cast some twigs on the stones and set them ablaze in an act of unification, “Whose secret is the word |שׁוֹלֵם, שׁנָה, נְפָשָׁה (smoke), an acronym for (world, year, soul) and which is hinted at in the verse ‘And Mt. Sinai was entirely in smoke’”¹³⁹² ¹³⁹³ Others may stand upright and extend their arms to become reflective conduits affecting a proper surge between specific sefirot on high – a flow for which their own hearts were rendered *axis spiritualis* in correspondence with Sefirah *Tiferet*. A few may perchance locate an active *water well* [*be’er* -

¹³⁸⁹ *Pardes Rimonim* 21:1.

¹³⁹⁰ *Eilima Rabbat*, *Ein Kol* 4:4.

¹³⁹¹ See e.g., *Pardes Rimonim* 8:21.

¹³⁹² Exodus 19:18.

¹³⁹³ *Pardes Rimonim* 21:6. Compare with *Sefer Gerushin*, entries 61, pp.73-75; 82, p.106; 91, p.122 and *Eilima Rabbat*, *Ein Shemesh* 3:3.

[בָּאָר] whose association with *Malkhut* rendered it yet another portal toward exegetical potency [לְבָאָר]. They would than utilize its clout in order to affect in turn a nearby *dry pit* (*bor* – בָּור) whose phonetic association with *בָּאָר* now rendered it in need of spiritual repair.¹³⁹⁴ Some would remain embedded in the soil, clipping their nails and burning them in an open fire as an act of symbolic riddance of impurity. Others may dip their fingers in oil as a further sign of spiritual cleansing or drop a bit of oil on the water, harnessing its ability to scrutinize colors and reflect them as does the *Hokhmah* above.¹³⁹⁵

Some may sit and assume a fetal position wherein their heads would deeply tuck between their knees¹³⁹⁶ and their arms would cover their heads in a shielding gesture. Numbing the senses of the body¹³⁹⁷ and with eyes shunned to hindrance within and without, their bodies would emulate both Adam in his pre-realized state and the sefirot “Who are united head in tail and tail in head”.¹³⁹⁸ Body and hosting landscape would now turn into a *womb of truth* and a *Garden of Eden* in whom they were the fetus whose blissful nourishment allows profound epistemic transparency - ‘to see from one end of the world to the other’ in the words of the Talmud:¹³⁹⁹ the prophet Elijah did it¹⁴⁰⁰ and so did Rabbis Elazar ben Dordeya,¹⁴⁰¹ Hamina ben Dosa¹⁴⁰² and Akiva ben Yoseph.¹⁴⁰³ Others may assume this gesture as to imagine themselves dissolving completely in sanctification of God’s name and the abolition of all idol elements, *sacrificing* themselves [קָרְבָּן]¹⁴⁰⁴ through both a corporeal positioning which corresponds with “Head [over] legs and entrails” (Exodus 12:9)¹⁴⁰⁵ and the liturgical union of the letters הַהְוָה which is “A sacrifice to the Lord”,¹⁴⁰⁶ [קָרְבָּן לְהָהָה] meaning the unification and merger [יחוֹד וּקְרוּבָה] of the letters

הַהְוָה¹⁴⁰⁷ - and by doing so drawing dramatically nearer [קָרֵב] the divine, to God’s *innermost interiority* [בְּקָרְבָּנוּ].¹⁴⁰⁸

Regrouping once a deeper layer had been aroused within self, body, text, earth and heaven, a member would pose a *difficulty* [חִשְׁמָדָה] which pertained to a particular verse – all such difficulties having been associated with *Malkhut* and her agitation.¹⁴⁰⁹ A lively communication would ensue, fortified by oral elucidations in form of great ecstatic momentum - usually from Alkabetz or RaMaK. RaMaK would harness the potency of cosmic dialectics here as well, insisting that all *sit on the hard terrain* [in order to dialectically *relief spiritual provision*], “For I have heard that such was the practice among the ancients, who used to sit upon the earth when teaching this wisdom to students in order to bring out their humbleness and awe”.¹⁴¹⁰ As the aroused landscape would now host and orchestrate a spirited back and fro discourse between the heavens and these mystics, the members would distinguish between *awards* and *gifts*: the former would constitute insights which were gradually recovered via the fellowship’s spirited discourse; the latter – a flash of innovative epistemic brilliance [חִידּוּשׁ – hidush] handed down by the heavenly *Princess* in gratitude for their industrious love¹⁴¹¹ and ‘Consecration anew of heaven an earth’ [חִידּוּשׁ שְׁמֵים וְאָرֶץ], allowing her presence the redemptive clarity it had yearned for. So bright would this light be and so powerful its multi-expressive effect, that words would gush forth through a mystic’s mouth ‘of their own volition’, turning his ears into an audience stunned by his own preaching words; a vessel whose knowledge no longer relied on progress but rather reached the domain of unmediated intuition - “Things so remarkable as to defy comprehension unless one has tried them time and again”; a realm impenetrable by mortals save through divine benevolence - a gift! During (or perhaps after) such moments, a member would write each forthcoming word with great zeal – his hand possibly guided by the *Shekhinah* as well.

Upon reaching a primary destination, usually the grave-marker of a saintly sage, Alkabetz would order the fellowship to prepare for its arousal. This was the pinnacle of these ordeals, a theatre of practices whose understanding would require our bystander to fathom the broader and complex associations between the theosophical edifice and the earthly landscape – one best articulated by the term *opposing mirror*: the most astute among the members would put on their

¹³⁹⁴ *Pardes Rimonim* 23:2 under בָּאָר and בָּור.

¹³⁹⁵ See *Eilima Rabbiati*, *Ein Ro'i* 4:10.

¹³⁹⁶ A fascinating motif whose meaning should be further investigated. As I had already mentioned, it is plausible that such a gesture aimed to symbolically focus on the circumcised area in order to stimulate innovations through language - בְּבִיהִ מִילָּה. For other explorations of this gestures, see Fenton, P. (1994 b), pp.19-29.

¹³⁹⁷ See e.g. ibn Tzayah, *Even ha-Shoham*, in Scholem, G. (1930), No. 33, p.90.

¹³⁹⁸ See *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:6 and RaMaK’s *Perush le-Sefer Yetzirah* 1:6.

¹³⁹⁹ *Babylonian, Nidah* 30b.

¹⁴⁰⁰ 1 Kings 18:42.

¹⁴⁰¹ *Babylonian, Avodah Zarah* 17a.

¹⁴⁰² *Babylonian, Berakhot* 34b.

¹⁴⁰³ *Heikhalot Zutarti*, in Elior, R. (2001), p.36; Fenton, P. (1994 b), pp.21-22.

¹⁴⁰⁴ See e.g., *Or Yaqrar* on *Zohar*, *Kedoshim* 1 and *Pinhas* 1.

¹⁴⁰⁵ See *Zohar* 2:18a.

¹⁴⁰⁶ See *Leviticus* 1:2; 17:4; 27:9,11.

¹⁴⁰⁷ *Tefilah le-Moshe* 2:5.

¹⁴⁰⁸ See e.g., *Zohar* 1:127b.

¹⁴⁰⁹ See *Pardes Rimonim* 23:19 under אֲשֶׁר.

¹⁴¹⁰ Or *Ne’erav* 3:2.

¹⁴¹¹ On this issue, see Green, A. in Heschel, S. (ed., 1983).

prayer shawls and phylacteries in order to *undress* corporeality and *extend* spirituality – both measures dialectically fused within the word מושחתת [hitpashtut].¹⁴¹² Assuming now the *female* role in order to arouse the *Malkhut* above (so she may arouse the *Tif'eret* via *Yesod*), RaMaK would approach the tombstone from the *right* and lie initially so his head and body are to the *left* of the deceased *Tzadik* [who is laid on his back]: drawing from the *Zoharic* view of the theosophical erotica expressed in the Song of Songs, RaMaK would now assume the role which is usually ascribed to the female spouse and awaken the deceased *Tzadik* so he may in turn “Concentrate on drawing the *Shekhinah* near through the aroused aspect of the left [side of the body], according to the esoteric meaning of the verse ‘[...] his left [arm] lies under my head’¹⁴¹³ [...] and later – as the verse continues - ‘and his right arm shall embrace me’. He should [now] concentrate on sweetening all those acts of restoring the *Shekhinah* via his *good inclination*, literally reinstating the *Shekhinah* and causing her to rejoice by performing this precept for the sake of the *Supernal Union*”.¹⁴¹⁴

RaMaK would probably repeat this technique three consecutive times; standing and lying down again, crying to the heavens in recitation of Elijah’s famous words “O Lord my God, let this soul return to its body”.¹⁴¹⁵ In their search for aroused response below, RaMaK’s cohort would espouse acts connoting sensual stimulation; pressing their bodies against the grave-marker, whispering words of love and longing, pleading with the deceased to awake through tender kisses of spiritual resuscitation – maneuvering their bodies to match with the deceased *Tzadik* beneath in mirroring reflection of the *Shekhinah* who longs for her husband *Tif'eret* and spreads herself in receptive submission. As arousal had been achieved, RaMaK [female] would supplicate *on top* of the grave-mark (*Yesod*), stretching his limbs a la da Vinci’s *vitruvian man* and *pressing* against the stone – thus *mirroring* the opposite apparatus on high wherein the *Malkhut* lies *under* the *Yesod*, spreading in six directions and *lifting* herself toward him. *Yesod*, in turn, would be aroused to reunite her with her husband *Tif'eret*, “Who has six dimensions”.¹⁴¹⁶

Such sensual appeasements meant also to stimulate the deceased sage’s lips - which ‘never truly ceased from uttering secrets of Torah’¹⁴¹⁷ - to intercede on their behalf on high and to assist

in their quest for esoteric insights below. RaMaK would even exchange the name *Yesod* with *Tzadik* in some of his theosophical designs,¹⁴¹⁸ demonstrating his adherence to the great esteem given to such men. Having been deemed ‘a *foundation* of the world’, the deceased *Tzadik* was associated with Sefirah *Yesod* (*foundation*) and rendered ‘a man of the land’ or *axis mundi* – a major player in the perpetual consecration of heaven and earth; a further negotiator between vertical and horizontal spiritual exchanges whose grave-marker [*נקוחת ציון*] was nothing short of a small temple.

The mystics’ ingenious employment of the word ציון (Tziyon = Zion / tziyun = a pointer / a landmark) – albeit grounded in earlier Jewish texts¹⁴¹⁹ – would lead them to deem these grave-markers pointers toward the potential unification of *Yesod* with *Malkhut*. Given that ציון (Zion) referred to both sefirot,¹⁴²⁰ the landmark (*tziyun*) now became a portal of intense intimacy between the living *Tzadik* (= *Malkhut* / female) and his deceased predecessor (= *Yesod* / male) – symbolizing through the reunion of the single word ציון the reunion of their productive organs. Such gestures transformed the level of discourse to such an erotic degree as to have it border on *spiritual intercourse*, whereupon a living mystic would aim to reach a radical infusion of spirits with his deceased counterpart - to *kiss* the grave-marker with sensual intensity, “For the kiss is undeniably the cleaving of one soul to another”,¹⁴²¹ to “Prostrate within his interiority” [בקרבו]; to cleave [כבד] to his soul much like “A man [who] must cleave to his wife”,¹⁴²² “To know him / to become known through him” [מודיע] much like Adam who “Had known his wife Eve”,¹⁴²³ and “To take note of him” [נזכר] much like God who “Had taken note of Sarah / Hannah”, thus effecting their impregnation.¹⁴²⁴

These ordeals had transformed into highly intimate orchestration of dialectic exchange – a mechanism wherein ‘pressing against the body’ of the deceased *Tzadik* (who was lying on his back) affected his soul which “Is a mirror turned upward”¹⁴²⁵ and produced a spirited light shooting upward to *Yesod* above. The *Yesod* in turn pressed against his superior *Tiferet* and orchestrated its reunion with *Malkhut* below him – a matrimony which translated also as

¹⁴¹⁸ See e.g., *Pardes Rimonim* 11:3.

¹⁴¹⁹ On this issue see Wofson, E.R. (1987), pp.189-215.

¹⁴²⁰ See *Pardes Rimonim* 23:18 under ציון.

¹⁴²¹ *Or Ne'erav* 6:3.

¹⁴²² Genesis 2:24.

¹⁴²³ Genesis 4:1 and compare with *Or Ne'erav* 2:1.

¹⁴²⁴ Genesis 21:1; 1 Samuel 2:21.

¹⁴²⁵ Ibid, entry 91, p.105.

¹⁴¹² See e.g., *Shiur Qomah*, p.5.

¹⁴¹³ Song of Songs 8:3.

¹⁴¹⁴ *Tomer Devorah* 6; translation in Miller, M. (1993), pp.105-107 with certain modifications.

¹⁴¹⁵ 1 Chronicles 17:21 and see *Shiur Qomah*, p.5.

¹⁴¹⁶ See *Pardes Rimonim* 23:1 under נזק.

¹⁴¹⁷ See *Babylonian*, Yavamot 97a; Sanhedrin 90b; Bekhorot 31b.

splendidly innovative insights, both sources of profound delight and further remedial formulas. While certain members were occupied with such intimate discourse, others may have leaped to their feet and jump passionately as an empowering gesture for the *Shekhinah* “Who jumps to consummate her love for her husband”.¹⁴²⁶ Others may yet meditate, attempting to visualize the sage’s face and draw near him, while some may beat olives into oil to arouse the deceased *Tzadik* and affect the *Sefirah Yesod* “Who is called ‘a fresh olive tree’¹⁴²⁷ [...] and beats its olives into oil to pour it gracefully on the *Malkhut*.¹⁴²⁸

Consorting with the deceased *Tzadikim* was by no means a rite free of manifold perils. Having been such momentous portals for cosmic repair, the mishandling of these grave-markers could have unleashed a tremendous blow from a malevolent heavenly agent and therefore had to be performed “At maximum haste, without prolonging”.¹⁴²⁹ At such inauspicious instances of demonic transubstantiation [עיבור ש], our distraught bystander might witness a member convulsing or shouting in a feat of indignation and uncontrolled outrage, whereupon he might harm his own body to disarm its spiritual trajectory and decommission its corporeal vitality - collapsing thereafter exhausted on the ground, emitting growling sounds and foaming from the mouth in dissipating ripples of an epileptic fit. The possibility for angelic or demonic transubstantiation [הנשמה המתUberת בז, או המלאך או השם] was very much a part of RaMaK’s life, one whose profound rewards also created for such mystics a spiritual path fraught with grave dangers. RaMaK would endorse *exorcism* only if done by proper men who are well versed with the complex demonic realms and can pinpoint with accuracy the nature of the demon in order to invoke the precise incantation needed for its demise [והחכם שישב ייעש השד צרייך שידע מאיזה משפחה הוא, ועוד לדרעת מאיזה חלק הוא... כדי להבריחו מואהש הוא].¹⁴³⁰ The disoriented member would therefore be approached by Alkabetz, RaMaK or another member conversed in these mediums, whereupon they would invoke the required remedial agents in a stark voice, their mouths whispering commands and letters which would completely baffle not only our bewildered bystander but perhaps some of the junior members as well.

The mystics may then enter a cave of another sage, whereupon they would consecrate it through prayer, meditation or by striking its walls to extract water buried under - inaugurating

¹⁴²⁶ *Pardes Rimonim* 23:19 under פְּקִיעָה.

¹⁴²⁷ See Jeremiah 11:16.

¹⁴²⁸ *Pardes Rimonim* 23:21 under מַעֲוָה.

¹⁴²⁹ *Sefer Gerushim*, entry 32, p.35.

¹⁴³⁰ *Derishot ve-Hakirot be-Inyanei ha-Mal'akhim* 5:7; cf. *Shemu'ah be-Inyan ha-Gilgul*, end of note 6.

anew its residual sacredness dormant for centuries and cleansing it from the shells hindering its rejuvenation. Elsewhere they would pray fervently amidst the ruins of a synagogue, forming various clusters in order to affect particular sefirotic configurations – one, three, five, six, seven - or the זעה (*edah*) of ten worshipers necessary to correspond with the sefirotic scheme entire. Perhaps they would traverse the remains of an ancient Jewish village, retracing the footsteps of their saintly precursors and invoking their names with special incantations so they would join their mission – RaMaK’s cohort was after all nourishing to maturity the spiritual radiance birthed by Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai and his fellowship some thirteen centuries earlier. In such conjunctions wherein Man-Land-Sefirah triangulation had reached optimum accuracy, their discourse would often reach levels of drastic exultation, in which episodes of tremendous spiritual illumination would follow: their empathic pledge to divinity and stake in its welfare would now emancipate insights so overwhelming as to have the words on their lips drive noticeably enduring ripples through their bodies – an effect whose residual presence may remain and inform the mystic long after the ordeal had concluded.

It would probably be difficult for our bystander to ascertain a particular moment upon which the fellowship determined the *conclusion* of such excursions: innovations may have been associated with specific times or places within the vicinity and conclude once these spatiotemporal boundaries either reached fruition or were breached. There might have been an abrupt cessation of innovations from above, followed by a profound silence which engulfed the group and hinted at the exhaustion of divine communications for that specific conjuncture. Perhaps it was not the exhaustion of the *Shekhinah* but rather that of the mystic’s which brought an ordeal to a halt - a fellow succumbing to the perpetual intensity of such insights and ‘breaking the communicative channel’ by a loss of concentration or perhaps even consciousness. Be that as it may, the fellowship would conclude its mission between bewilderment and euphoria, praising a successful excursion which had lead it one step closer to complete deliverance, and depart the Galilean theatre whose transformed scope allowed the *Princess* to communicate with them in thunderous whispers.

En route back to Safed [עיר], Alkabets and RaMaK may per chance extend their banishment for certain benedictions and rituals pertaining to the highest ranking kabbalists, their respective sefirot and theurgic responsibilities thereof. Upon return, the company entire would cherish these secrets, keeping them close to heart and mouth: aware of their leading role before Israel and God,

the words revealed to them and the sensation of the *Shekhinah* further unified were not to be disseminated without severe scrutiny. They would revisit and study them in Safed, extracting further insights which may lead to moral communal requisites, social discourse and pedagogic techniques. RaMaK would return home as well, either to write the ordeals himself or to look at notes taken by a fellow while he had been engaged in intuitive discourse. It seems that sometime between 1549 and 1551 – after already having embarked on composing *Or Yaqr* – RaMaK would revisit these notes, cross-referencing them with *Pardes Rimonim* and other teachings of his master Alkabetz as a short piece to circulate among the members, featuring some 90 entries.

It seems quite evident, albeit for reasons which still elude us, that neither RaMaK nor his fellowship practiced *gerushin* between 1548 and 1551. RaMaK's direct disclosure of the year 1551 in entry 91 corroborates this assessment as it professes his desire to link the following *gerushin* with the ones enacted earlier. In any event, RaMaK would resume the practice of *gerushin* for a short while during 1551, albeit this time seemingly on his own. He would write these experiences and arrange them later in further entries of which 9 are extant today. Written and left this time in an intimate diary format, these entries are conspicuously free of references, excluding the last entry which cites the second part of *Or Yaqr*. Perhaps it was the continuous work on this magnum opus in 1551 which served as the chief impetus behind these solitary excursions, as RaMaK would later disclose in *Or Yaqr* the prostrations, innovations and celestial assistance rendered toward its fruition.¹⁴³¹ RaMaK's notes in these 9 entries end abruptly and the work as a whole furnishes neither a conclusion nor a heading – the latter would be given in Venice half a century later by Rabbi David ibn Hin, who compiled the 99 entries for publication and titled them *Sefer Gerushin* (1601-2).

Sefer Gerushin: Introduction

Due to their intricate correlations and introductory value for the mystical devotion which permeates *Sefer Gerushin*, the prefaces to *Eilima Rabbati* [Ein Adam 6] and *Tomer Devorah* benefit from the following juxtaposition:

במעשה האדם ותועלתו^{*} לעלונים או רוח או השפעה, והיותו מנענע העולמות העליונים והיותו מרכבה / אל הספרות, וכל מה שותקנו^{*} הקדמוןים והמרכבות מאן אדם הראשון ועד עולם, ותוקנו עד סוף / בדרך ישירה שיבור לו האדם, והתבודתו ותכליתו והתבוננות דרכיו [...]

¹⁴³¹ Please refer to the section “*Or Yaqr*” in RaMaK's *Writings*.

Concerning the action[s] of man and his contribution / funneling* to the higher rungs – [be it through] either light or effect - and his competence to shake the higher worlds and his existence as a chariot for the sefirot – all that has been decreed / restored* by the ancient men and the chariots from Primordial Adam till all eternity, and *his/its** ultimate restoration¹⁴³² / The straight path for man to contemplate upon;¹⁴³³ his solitary aptitude,* his essential purpose of being and insight into his deeds.¹⁴³⁴

Sefer Gerushin is a potently felt actualization of the above ideas, incorporating the *imitatio Dei* and *theurgic* principals into a meticulously enacted mystical drama which was not shy of *geopolitical* aspirations as well. In *Or Yaqr* RaMaK views radical occupation with the Torah “An act of unification which stands in opposite to exile [and] prevents banishments from Israel”,¹⁴³⁵ a mystical configuration whose underpinning political assurance is quite visible, considering RaMaK's turbulent era. Although the subtle backdrop of *Sefer Gerushin* sustains the major building blocks of RaMaK's speculation, its chief impetus was nonetheless the devotional reification whose fruition converged an impressive amalgamation of spiritual, corporeal and spatiotemporal arrangements. Correspondingly, the pivotal role allotted to the Galilean landscape and its transformation into *axis spiritualis* in the execution of these rites should arguably be given much more attention. RaMaK's engineering of the theosophical edifice in relation to the landscape itself suggests that he does not merely speculate on the different meanings behind the cosmic mechanisms and their relationships with the human microcosmic condition thereof, but rather charts the inner life of a theosophical edifice whose contingency on the sacred *cartography* of the Galilean vicinities was as profound as that upheld by the mystics. RaMaK's view of the Galilee was utterly mediated by the *Zoharic* lenses, the very speculums which he believed to have been polished amidst its hills, caves and water pits.¹⁴³⁶ And indeed a

¹⁴³² Mic. 2174, Jewish Theological Seminary, p.163a. * These words are highly subtle and contain multiple meanings stemming from etymological associations: 1) תְּחִילָה – both *contribution* / *input* and *funneling* / *channeling* – the view of theosophical trafficking in form of conduits / pipes [צַנְחוֹת – see *Pardes Rimonim*, *Shaar ha-Tzinorot*] which clearly demonstrates this subtle dual meaning. See also *Eilima Rabbati*, *Ein Kol* 5, end of chapter 38. 2) מֵרָה – both *decree* and *restoration*: pertaining to both intellectual and practical engagements with divine worship. 3) טַהֲרָה – in general can pertain to either man [his] or the sefirot [its]. The term קָדוֹשׁ may thus pertain to both men and world.

¹⁴³³ Compare with *Or Yaqr* on *Zohar*, Bereshit 6:41.

¹⁴³⁴ JTS Mic. 2174, p.200a. * – as shall be demonstrated, RaMaK's employment of this term pertains to both contemplation and practical isolation. On the idea of the chariot in Rabbinic literature, see also Dan, J. (1983).

¹⁴³⁵ *Or Yaqr* on *Zohar*, va-Yeshev 8:4.

¹⁴³⁶ Interesting here is I. Tishby's section titled “The Topography of the Zohar”, wherein he discusses the numerous topographical errors made by the Zoharic authors in regards to places in the Palestinian vicinity and the Galilean region in particular. See Tishby, I. (1949), vol.1, pp.63-64. RaMaK never addressed such matters.